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Missions Still Must Go On!

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When we look at the world situation, the prospects for missionary advance are not very bright. We have just passed through two great world wars, and a third war, even more terrible, is threatening us. Communism is continuing to spread, taking country after country behind its "iron curtain" in the West or its "bamboo curtain" in the East. The world unrest makes mission work difficult in many places that are not controlled by Communists. Is advance in foreign missions possible then, under present world conditions, or should we wait for a more favorable time?

What does the Bible say about advance? Although times were as dark then as they are now, the writers of the New Testament express great courage and faith.

Three passages may be cited as examples. The first is John 16:33: "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye may have peace. In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (ASV). These words were spoken by Jesus on the evening before his crucifixion. He knew that suffering and death were before him but he had unaltering faith in the power of God to raise him from the dead. So he confidently declared, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." Tribulations will come, but final victory is with God and his people. Surely this is what the living Christ still says to his followers!

Another good example is Romans 8:37-39: "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (ASV). Do we face any difficulty or problem which Paul did not name? Can't we have the same confidence that we can be "more than conquerors" through the power which God will give us?

One of the most important passages is I Corinthians 16:8, 9: "But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost; for a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries" (ASV). Paul did not see in the adversaries which faced him any reason for discouragement or fear. He saw only a challenge to greater effort.

If we take the words of the Bible seriously, we shall not hesitate to plan advance in the face of difficulties. We shall accept the difficulties as additional reasons for advance.

What does history have to say to us? Can't we find in history examples of spiritual advance in the midst of war and unrest?

One of our greatest modern historians says that the clue to the rise and fall of human civilization lies in what he calls "challenge and response." To put it briefly, man has made his greatest advances, not when he had favorable surroundings, but when he responded to some particularly difficult situation.

Another great historian is Dr. Kenneth Scott Latourette of Yale, who has written the history of Christian expansion. He points out that Christianity has advanced in a series of great waves. Each wave of expansion has been followed by a period of recession during which the advance was slowed up somewhat. But always there came another wave of advance, and each succeeding wave carried a little farther than the last one.

Dr. Latourette calls the last volume of his history of Christian expansion *Advance Through Storm*. It covers the years from 1914 to 1944. This definitely was a stormy period, with two world wars, a major depression, and other troubles crowded into the thirty years. But, even so, Christianity made some outstanding advances during these times.

Apparently the stormy weather will not be over for some time. But this should not discourage us. Dr. Latourette declares that we may be standing on the threshold of the greatest period of advance the world has ever seen.

Are the difficulties we face today of a new and different kind? Is it the threat of war that holds up missionary advance? When in the history of the world has there not been the threat of war? If Christians had waited until everything was calm and peaceful, nothing would ever have been done.

William Carey set sail from England as the first modern missionary in 1793. Was everything quiet and peaceful then? No—the French Revolution was just over, and Napoleon was rising in power. Soon there was actual war not to be ended until 1815. But during those very years the mission in India was started, and many new missionaries went out to join Carey.

In February, 1812, Adoniram and Ann Judson set sail as the first American foreign missionaries. Have you ever heard of the War of 1812? It had not officially begun in February, but the British were blockading our coasts. War was declared in June, 1812, and continued until 1815. But the Judsons were beginning the first American Baptist mission in Burma, and in 1814, while we were still at war, American Baptists organized their first foreign missionary society.

Is it Communism of which we are afraid? To be sure, Communism is a serious enemy and a rival of true Christianity. But in the past Christianity has met other rivals no less strong and no more friendly. We did not refuse to send missionaries to India because Hinduism was strong there, with many millions of followers opposed to our way of life. Neither can we haul down our colors because a few million Communists are noisily opposing us and claiming that they have the true way of life for mankind.

There is nothing new in our perils and difficulties. Christianity is used to trouble. When old Brer Fox threw Brer Rabbit in the briar patch, he kicked up his heels and cried, "I was born and bred in de briar patch!" Christianity was born in a war-torn old world

and has made its greatest advances in the face of persecution.

What about foreign missions? Is advance actually taking place outside the boundaries of the United States?

The Foreign Mission Board is advancing toward the goal of 1,750 active missionaries on the staff. When the Advance Program was first announced in 1948, there were about 670 missionaries in service. By December, 1950, the number had been increased to 803. One hundred eleven new missionaries were appointed in 1950, and the goal is 100 appointees in 1951. The Board hopes to increase the number of new missionaries appointed in direct ratio to the increased resources in money which are made available by Southern Baptists.

Already it is possible to see the actual results of the Advance Program on the various mission fields.

In Nigeria the foreign mission staff has been doubled in the last ten years. Among new developments are a new girls' school, a new hospital, a new training center for elementary teachers, and a new headquarters building for the mission.

From Europe also come encouraging reports. In Italy an orphanage for girls has been opened, a training school for young women in Rome, and a new seminary in Turin. In Zurich, Switzerland, one of the most important developments has taken place—the opening of a theological seminary for Baptists from various European countries.

In spite of trouble in the Near East, advance is going forward even there. Land has been secured for a new school and for a Jewish-Christian colony in Israel. Two medical doctors and a trained nurse have been appointed for Jordan to staff a recently acquired hospital at Ajloun.

China is the most disturbed and difficult field today. The Communist occupation of China and the fact that the missionaries have had to leave have served to cause us to enter other fields in Asia. Some of the China missionaries are going to countries formerly unreached by Southern Baptists, such as Siam, the Philippines, Malaya, Indonesia, and India.

Japan has seen the greatest advance of all. With seventy-five missionaries under appointment, we are hoping to increase the number to one hundred before 1952. A new senior college and administration building, a seminary building, and several new churches have been built recently.

Throughout Latin America our advance has been going on steadily for years. Here, too, the staff has been doubled. A new Baptist school has been opened in Brazil, two airplanes have been bought for use in reaching the interior of the Amazon Valley, and medical work has been begun in Paraguay, Colombia, and Mexico.

On dozens of fronts around the world advance has already begun! In spite of war, Communism, and all the difficulties that face us, advance is possible. Not only that, it is taking place now.

But we need to remember that advance in foreign missions can take place only as advance takes place in the local church and in our own lives. The Advance Program is one gerat program for Southern Baptists. We all go forward together.

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